

# Field Notes

P.O. Box 81065 Fairbanks, AK 99708 907-452-5162 creamers@ptialaska.net www.creamersfield.org

## Boreal Forest Trail Reconstruction Complete

By Melissa Sikes

Reconstruction of the boreal forest trail is complete, and the trail is once again open to the public. During the annual membership picnic on September 9<sup>th</sup>, a ribbon cutting ceremony was held marking the official re-opening of the trail. Caryn Rea, from ConocoPhillips, was on hand to cut the beautiful ribbon made of plant material found near the trail. Following the ribbon cutting, the group took a lovely walk through the newly restored trail, and Mark Ross shared some wonderful observations and natural history about the trail.

A new Holland Rotary mower was purchased and used this summer and fall to mow the fields in a way that enhances habitat for the many Sandhill Cranes, Canada Geese, and other waterfowl that migrate through the refuge.

Some work remains to complete the boreal forest trail. Simon McLoughlin, the contractor who worked on the boardwalks last summer, is reconstructing the observation/viewing platform that was removed for safety reasons. This should be ready for use by January. Interpretive signs are being developed with the goal to have them in place by summer 2007. Concurrently the trail guide booklet will be updated to accompany the signs. Handrails and benches will be added to the trail and should be in place this summer.



Ribbon cutting to re-open the boreal forest trail. Photo by Jess Ryan

## ConocoPhillips Visit

By Cathie Harms

On Thursday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, Creamer's Refuge welcomed representatives of ConocoPhillips Alaska (CPA) to the Farmhouse Nature Center and the Boreal Forest Trail. Despite chilly weather, Health, Environment, and Safety Manager Ken Donajkowski, Senior Environmental Coordinator Sally Rothwell, and Rick Solie of the Fairbanks CPA office walked the loop trail to view progress funded by a grant from CPA to Friends of Creamer's Field. All three were enthusiastic about the new sections of boardwalk and enjoyed wildlife viewing with Creamer's staff including Education Biologist Mark Ross, Education Intern Melissa Sikes, Wildlife Biologist Jason Caikowski, and Regional Program Manager Cathie Harms. In particular, Ken voiced his support for the refuge, Friends of Creamer's Field, and upcoming projects. He made plans to return to Creamer's in May to see migrating waterfowl and took an application to become a member of Friends.

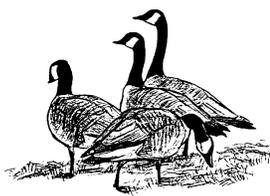
Mark Ross, Education Intern Melissa Sikes, Wildlife Biologist Jason Caikowski, and Regional Program Manager Cathie Harms. In particular, Ken voiced his support for the refuge, Friends of Creamer's Field, and upcoming projects. He made plans to return to Creamer's in May to see migrating waterfowl and took an application to become a member of Friends.



A group explores the newly re-opened boreal forest trail. Photo by Jess Ryan

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### Our Mission

Friends of Creamer's Field is a community based, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing educational, historical, and interpretive programs throughout the year at Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge.

# Changes at Friends Bring New Opportunities

By Jessica Ryan

Lots of changes have occurred at Creamer's Field since the last newsletter was published in August. Most notably, we have had a rotation of board members, I've stepped down as Executive Director, and the board has hired two wonderful people to replace me. I have been involved with Friends since 1999, and with these new changes I feel that the organization is really blossoming and coming into its own. Having two people to share the duties of running Friends will mean more public outreach, greater commu-

nity involvement, better programs, and a synergy of ideas.

As for me, I've accepted a job at the SeaLife Center in Seward, Alaska, as the Information Technologies Outreach Coordinator. The job suits me nicely, as it draws upon my experience in event coordination, writing, and membership outreach. Seward suits me, too. I feel like I've moved to Mayberry, where Andy Griffith sits on the porch playing guitar at night, and Opie drops by to see if I have any odd jobs he can do. It's really like that. No stoplights, a movie theater

that only features one movie at a time, friendly people at every turn, and I can walk to work. Best of all, it's lovely here, and I can pretty much count on it being 20-70 degrees warmer than in Fairbanks on any given winter day!



Jessica Ryan

I'll come back to visit to be sure. I can't wait to see all the transformations in store for Friends of Creamer's Field. And when you get down to Seward, stop in. I'll leave the porch light on for you.

# Alexis Runstadler Named Development Director

By Alexis Runstadler

I am Alexis Runstadler, the new Development Director for Friends of Creamer's Field and was hired November 1<sup>st</sup> along with Melissa Sikes, the new Program Director. I'm so very excited to be given this opportunity by the Friends of Creamer's Field Board of Directors! My duties as Development Director will primarily be focused on membership, fundraising, and the day-to-day financial operations of Friends of Creamer's Field. I will also work to facilitate communication between the various facets of our organization—the two new Directors, the Board of Directors, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the general public, and all of our terrific members and volunteers.

I moved to Fairbanks two years ago with my husband Jonathan Runstadler and our

two children Ethan (almost 6) and Verena (almost 3). We relocated here from Davis, California after Jon accepted a position at UAF as assistant professor of Biology and Wildlife in the Institute of

Arctic Biology. For almost the entire ten years we lived in Davis, I worked for the Computer Services department of the UC Davis Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital as a computer support specialist and then a programmer. When we moved to Fairbanks, I was able to keep my job with UC Davis and have continued my part-time programming position as a telecommuter for the past two years. My

background in the computer field is probably not what most directors at natural history education non-profits possess, but my skills working with diverse groups of

*continued on page three*



Alexis, Verena, Jonathan, and Ethan Runstadler

## Friends of Creamer's Field

### Board Members

Jim Chumbley, Vice President

Bob Craig

Jeannie Creamer-Dalton

Susie Crevensten

Pat DeRuyter, Secretary

Ray Hadley

Kris Hundertmark

Donna Krier

Sherry Lewis

Gail Mayo, Treasurer

Herb Melchior

Joy Morrison, President

Jon Runstadler

E. Tom Robinson

### Non-Voting Members

Alexis Runstadler,  
Development Director

Melissa Sikes, Program  
Director

Cathie Harms (ADF&G)

Mark Ross (ADF&G)

This issue of *Field Notes*  
was produced by Mary Zalar

## Melissa Sikes Becomes Program Director

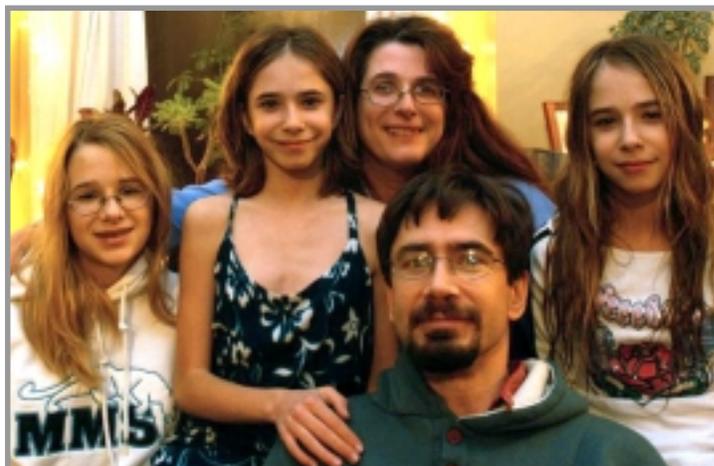
By Melissa Sikes

I feel so privileged to be chosen as one of the new directors for Friends of Creamer's Field. I am new to Fairbanks having moved here in July with my husband Derek, who is the new entomology collections curator at the UA Museum of the North, and my three daughters, Nina and Amelia, age 13 (twins), and Kaley, age 14. We drove up the Alcan Highway from just outside of Calgary, Alberta where we had lived for three years.

Before we chose to move to Alaska, I came for a visit in April of 2005. I literally had one day here and during my very short visit my "guide" took me to Creamer's Field at

my request. My first impressions of this wonderful place stuck with me and during the long waiting period before we moved I often thought about visiting again and exploring beyond the fields. I lucked into meeting Mark Ross and offered to volunteer for the fall school programs. I loved every minute of it. I learned quite a bit about Creamer's in those few short weeks, and I was hooked.

When Mark told me that the position of Executive Director was opening up, I realized that this was a chance to use my years of experience as an environmental educator to make a difference and be an integral part of this commu-



*Kaley, Nina, Melissa, Derek, and Amelia Sikes*

### Alexis Runstadler

*continued from page two*

people to solve problems, my technical and instructional writing skills, and my experience working with large computer equipment budgets will serve me well in my new position as Development Director for Friends of Creamer's Field.

Before transitioning into the computer field when we moved to Davis from New England, I trained and worked as a biologist. I have a B.A. in Biology from Drew University in Madison, New Jersey and I have done some M.S. degree work in Zoology at the University of New Hampshire. I was an aquarist at both the John G. Shedd Aquarium in Chicago and the New England Aquarium in Boston doing aquatic animal husbandry and research. This experience and training in Biology is something that I have always wanted to get back to, and I'm happy that working with Melissa will allow me to do that.

Creamer's Field Migratory Waterfowl Refuge is a unique and wonderful resource in Fairbanks that I know all of us involved with Friends cherish. Melissa and I are committed to continuing and advancing the use of the refuge in all its myriad aspects. I'm very excited to work with you, our members and volunteers, and I look forward to meeting all of you. Please call or email me with any of your ideas or concerns or just stop by our offices in the farmhouse to say "Hi." Our phone number is 452-5162 and email is creamers@ptialaska.net.

nity treasure. What a great opportunity—so I applied!

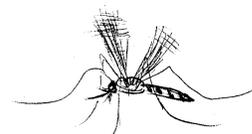
Here is a peek at some of the experience that I bring to this job. I earned my Bachelor's of Science degree in 1990 at Unity College in Maine in Outdoor Recreation. I have been an environmental educator for over 17 years, working at various outdoor centers in Maine, Rhode Island, New York, California, Montana, Connecticut, and Calgary, Alberta.

A highlight of my career was working for six years at Goodwin Conservation Center in northeastern Connecticut as the grant coordinator for SNAP, the School Nature Area Program. SNAP was developed to train teachers to make use of the nature areas at their schools. Funded by grant money and partnered with the Connecticut Audubon Society, the program grew from the initial nine schools and about 17 teachers to over 120 schools and countless teachers. I also had a wonderful experience working for the Calgary Zoo while we were in Canada, helping

them to establish a teacher training program modeled after my work with schools in Connecticut.

My many years of experience as an outdoor educator have helped me develop a strong belief in the value of experiential environmental education. I am a well-rounded naturalist who is always observing, a self-confessed amateur birder, teacher, and student-ascribed "bug lady." I am also a history buff and enjoy learning about the colorful local history of every place that I have lived.

I look forward to coming to work at this wonderful place every day and look forward to the many possibilities that Creamer's Field has to offer. Please feel free to stop by or call me with your ideas or concerns.



## The Rotten World Around Us

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, The Creepy Critter's program featured the decomposer community at Creamer's Field. Visitors were greeted by a tank full of hard working dermestid beetles cleaning gruesome mammal skulls and skeletal parts from University of Alaska Museum of the North's mammal collection. Dr. Link Olson, curator of the collection, and his crew from the lab were on hand to answer questions. Dr. Gary Laursen, UAF Mycology professor, brought a fabulous collection of fungi including an active bright yellow slime mold, which visitors viewed under the microscope. Dr. Derek Sikes, UAF's new entomology collection curator and professor, brought his collection of burying beetles that were the subject of the costume craft of the day. Many "burying beetles" infested the Farmhouse that day as visitors created masks and wing covers. The snacks even had a decomposer theme, "worms and dirt." Thanks to all our many volunteers and specialists who made this event a resounding success.



*An excited beetle!*

Photo by Melissa Sikes

## Creamer's History Class

By Cathie Harms

A "History of Fairbanks" class taught by Dermot Cole met at the Farmhouse on Wednesday, November 15<sup>th</sup> to discuss Creamer's Dairy and its effects on the community. Three members of the Creamer's family were present—Jeanne, Roxie and Doug. All three are grandchildren of Charlie and Anna Creamer and shared memories of life at the Dairy. Doug had traveled to Fairbanks from Delta and led the discussion about how the dairy worked, along with stories which varied from letting the cows out of the barns in the spring, to funny memories of delivering milk in Fairbanks. Cathie Harms shared information about how the fields were obtained and designated a refuge and an update on efforts to provide public access to the barns. In his column in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, Dermot stated that Doug, Jeanne and Roxie provided the best presentation of the year!

## Joy Leads Creamer's Board

By Joy Morrison

It is an honor to have been elected Board President for the next two years. Currently I work at the University of Alaska Fairbanks where I direct the Office of Faculty Development and teach classes in Journalism and Women's Studies. Born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa, I arrived in the United States as a student in 1980. In 1990, I came to Alaska with the intention of staying for one year, completing my doctoral dissertation, and leaving. Instead I fell in love with Fairbanks and stayed.



*Joy Morrison*

At the urging of friend and fellow board member Pat Deruyter, I joined the Friends of Creamer's Field board in 2005 and am enjoying serving. Prior to this, I served on the boards of the Interior Alaska Center for Non-Violent Living (ex-WICCA) and the Literacy Council of Alaska.

My number one goal is to work with the board to open the barns to the public. We have such a treasure in these structures and their history, and we need to have them accessible so we can tell the full story of Creamer's Dairy. My secondary goal is to double our membership, because I know there are many Fairbanksans out there who, like me, use the trails all the time, but do not yet belong to Friends. With the help of our two new Directors of Programs and Development, we can encourage a lot more diversity in our membership. I am really looking forward to the next few years of working with this outstanding board.



### **2006 Quilt Raffle Winner**

*The stunning original quilt "Taking Refuge" by master quilter Karin Franzen features Sandhill Cranes in front of the Creamer's barns and was won by Joanne Groves.*

## Those Among Us: Kyle Campbell Studies in Vietnam

*Kyle Campbell, a biology major at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, has worked with Mark Ross at Creamer's Field for the past two years. Kyle headed to Vietnam in late August to spend five months studying in Southeast Asia as part of an international exchange program. Kyle recently communicated with us and had some interesting updates on his experience.*

By Kyle Campbell

Currently I am enrolled in a study abroad program through the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont, a branch of World Learning. Based in Can Tho City at the heart of the Mekong Delta, I am in a program called the *Mekong Delta: Natural and Cultural Ecology Program*. So far this semester I have visited many rural farms, diverse ecosystems from mangrove forests to melaleuca swamps, visited bird sanctuaries in the delta and in the Tonle Sap Lake in Cambodia, and did a comparative study of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam, where we spent a weekend camping in

the jungle of the Cuc Phuong National Park.

On November 8<sup>th</sup>, we began the Independent Study Project (ISP) where we no longer have any classes but are all working on our own individualized projects.

Until the first week of December, I am developing a research proposal requesting financial support for equipment and to recruit experienced banders to help initiate the project by next spring. My goal is to begin waterfowl and passerine banding facilities in two areas of the Plain of Reeds portion of the Mekong Delta, with the specific goal of taking viral samples to screen for the highly pathogenic avian influenza virus H5N1. I am working on building collaboration with the bird flu labs here in Vietnam, as well as with labs in Alaska and elsewhere in the world, and especially to team up with other bird monitoring and banding programs in Southeast Asia.

As far as I know this project is the first banding program in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, or possibly the whole of the country. (I have heard about a short-lived passerine banding project in the north that took place in the late 90's, but little information is available on it.) This would certainly be the first combination banding and viral sampling project in the country.

My approach is based on what I have learned and observed in Alaska as a volunteer with the Alaska Bird Observatory (since age 10) and by working in the field with ADF&G Biologist Mike Petrula and UAF researcher Nancy Gundlach banding Pintails, Green-winged Teals and Mallards at Minto Flats and taking cloacal swabs (viral samples) that were to be tested for bird flu at the UAF lab.

I will also visit the two wetland sites where I am proposing to install banding facilities, the Tram Chim National Park and the Lang Sen Wetlands Reserve, one of which I have visited before and observed many, many large waterbirds, oriental ducks, kingfishers, kites, drongos, bee-eaters, and so on. Of the species recorded on previous surveys in the area the Arctic Warbler is included, and I hope that with passerine banding stations in place the Alaska-nesting Warbler may be among the species netted. And who knows, with any luck we might find a band from Alaska!

I am using the North American Banding Council's manuals for guidance on the banding procedure as I demonstrate it in my proposal, and I have been getting help from UAF staff Kevin Winker and Jon Runstadler as well as biologists from the Canadian

Friends of Creamer's Field wishes you a Happy Holiday and invites you to join us for Holiday Events at Creamer's Field...

### Holiday Open House

On Saturdays, December 9, 16, and 23, the Farmhouse Visitor Center and Gift Shop will be open from Noon-5 pm with fun and nature oriented holiday craft activities to make and take home.

### Gift Shop Hours

The Farmhouse Visitor Center Gift Shop will be open Noon-5 pm on Saturdays and Sundays from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to December 23<sup>rd</sup>. A great selection of gifts for the whole family is available, members receive a discount of \$1 for every \$10 spent.



Wildlife Service and the Western Bird Banding Association. I am still in the process of connecting my project to other related projects in the region, and working on finding local and international agencies and organizations that may be able to provide experienced banders, funding, and equipment by this spring. If all the pieces fall in place correctly, I hope that banding facilities can be up and running by April 2007.



*Kyle Campbell in front of the Farmhouse Visitor Center.*

Photo courtesy of the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*/Sam Harrel



# Kids Nutty Chatter

Winter is a great time to explore and investigate the animals that brave our cold winter and stay active all year round. Evidence they leave behind can lead to a wonderful tale of an animal's everyday struggle to survive.

## The Three T's of Tracking

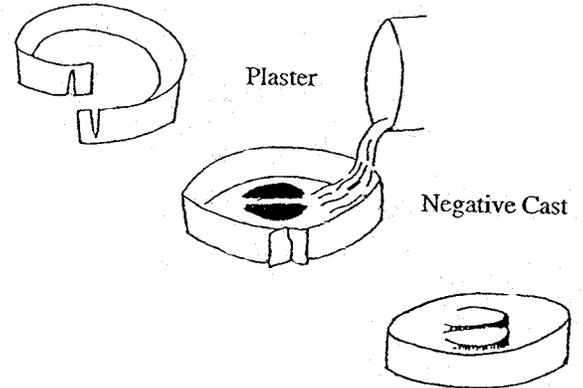
When looking for signs of animals remember:

**Track:** look at the individual footprints

**Trail:** look at the pattern of footprints to understand how the animal moves, where it went, who it encountered along it's travels

**Trace:** look for any other evidence left behind by the animal like scat, urine, hair, meal leavings, scratches on trees, etc.

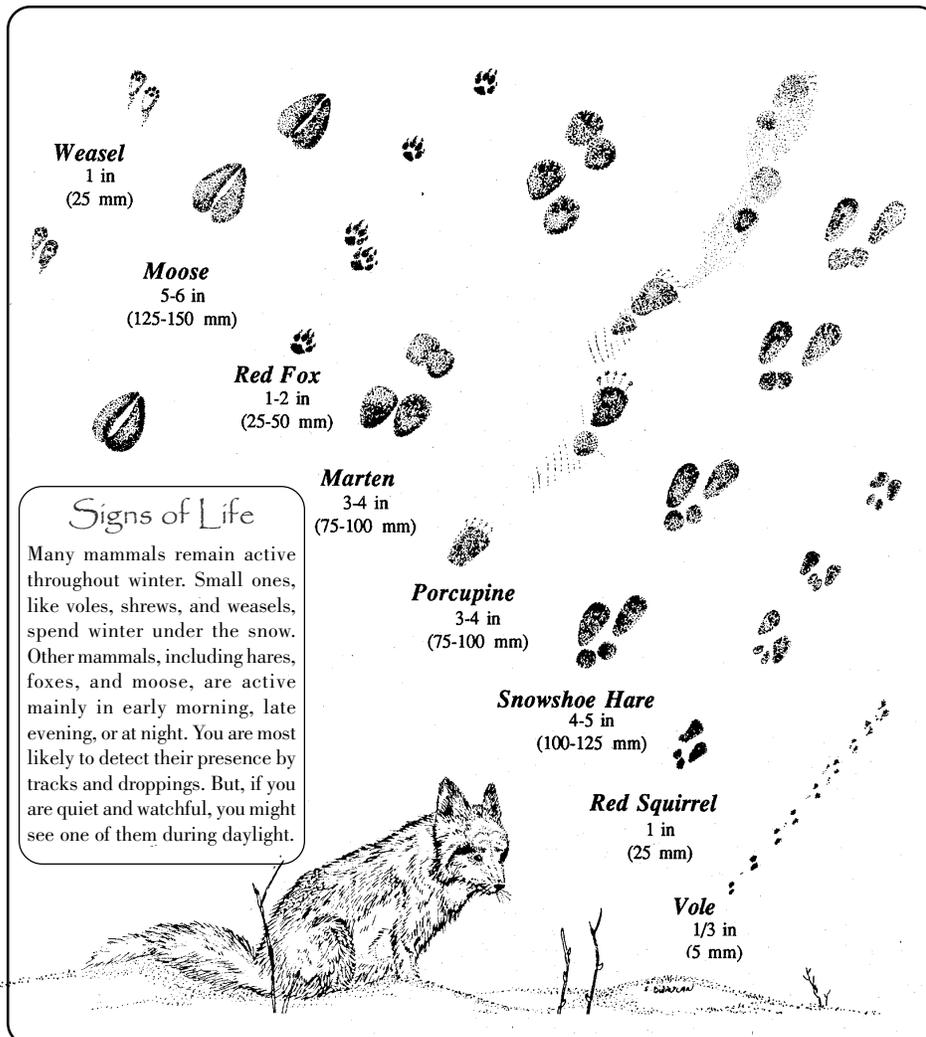
Cardboard Collar



## Casting Animal Tracks in the Winter

How to Make the Cast:

1. Prepare a plastic squeeze bottle with a small amount of dry plaster. Also prepare a spray bottle (plant mister) with lukewarm water.
2. Place a cardboard collar around the track and squeeze a dusting of plaster into all parts of the track.
3. Spray the track with water and let it freeze.
4. Repeat these steps until a hard crust has formed inside the track.
5. Mix plaster and water (2 parts plaster to 1 part water) to a thin batter with a consistency of melted ice cream.
6. Pour plaster into cardboard collar until the body of the cast is at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. The plaster should fill all areas inside the ring.
7. Let plaster set for a minimum of 20 minutes.
8. Pick up the cast, remove the cardboard collar.
9. Let cast set another 24 hours to thoroughly dry.



# Thanks To Our Volunteers and Supporters!

Friends of Creamer’s Field depends on our wonderful volunteers. Thank you to all our volunteers who have donated their valuable time to us during the summer events such as the Tanana Valley State Fair, Ninth Annual Sandhill Crane Festival, membership picnic, Creepy Critters program, and Thanksgiving for the Birds program. You are all so very valued and appreciated.

**Congratulations to Jim Chumbley** who was honored as Volunteer of the Year at our annual membership meeting on September 9<sup>th</sup>.

Please call us at 452-5162 and let us know if you are interested in volunteering for any of the following:

- Newsletter Stories and Nutty Chatter -- quarterly
- Webmaster for Friends website – as needed
- Visitor’s Center staff – ongoing (4-hour shifts)
- Saturday morning walk leaders for June–August (1–2 hours per walk)
- Garden help (1–2 hours per week)
- Treasurer (2 hours/month and quarterly taxes)
- Program helpers (2-4 hours/event)
- Distribute brochures – summer (1–2 hours as needed)
- Committee Member – call for details (1–2 hours a month)
- Public Survey and Membership Drive (1 or more hours, April and May)

## Creamer’s Volunteers

It’s your spirit and energy  
 That gives this place life  
 This special place speaks with  
 your voice  
 It’s through your love and sense  
 of place  
 Through sharing yourself, your  
 stories, and insight.  
 That Creamer’s Field touches the  
 community  
  
 Though it’s “for the birds”  
 Your time is well spent  
 Thanks for all that you give  
 It wouldn’t be the same without you  
 Thank you for inspiring others  
 To connect with a place  
 Near their home and heart  
 You certainly make this world a  
 little better

## Membership Response Form

**Has your membership expired?** Please check the date in the corner of your mailing label. If your membership has expired, or is due to expire soon, this will be your last issue of *Field Notes* unless we receive your renewal prior to the next newsletter. Your membership dues support our many popular programs that school children, nature lovers, bird enthusiasts, and families enjoy throughout the year. Friends does not share or rent our mailing list.

- |                               |                         |                        |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| _____ \$15 Students & Seniors | _____ \$75 Supporter    | _____ \$500 Patron*    |
| _____ \$20 Individual         | _____ \$100 Contributor | _____ \$1000 Lifetime* |
| _____ \$40 Family             | _____ \$250 Steward     | _____ Donation \$_____ |

*\*Patron and Lifetime members will receive a historic Randall Compton print of Creamer’s Dairy signed by the Creamer family.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

- This is a gift membership for the above name from \_\_\_\_\_
- I have a new mailing address, phone, or email.
- I would like to receive my newsletter electronically.

**I am interested in volunteering. Please contact me with information on how I can:**

- |                                     |                                         |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| _____ Become a Volunteer Naturalist | _____ Volunteer in the Visitor’s Center |
| _____ Help with Events & Programs   | _____ Help in the Vegetable Garden      |

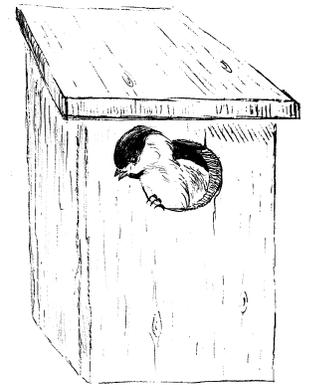
Friends of Creamer’s Field  
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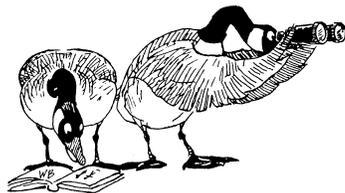
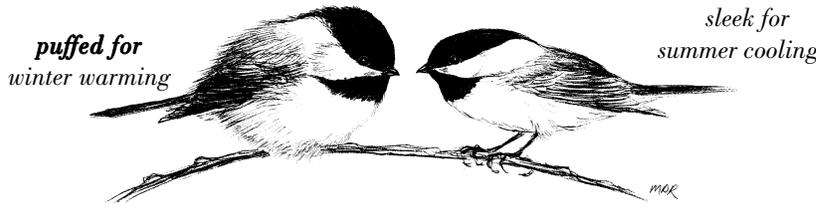
# The Solitary Side of Chickadee Life

**B**old and boisterous, that's the side usually shown by our most familiar feeder bird, the Black-capped Chickadee. We see and hear them scolding loudly, "chicka-dee-dee-dee," complaining about people too close to their feeder or alerting flockmates to possible predators like hawks and owls. And they always seem to be in flocks too, especially in winter. But wintertime also brings out the little known solitary and secretive side of the Black-capped Chickadee—during winter chickadees sleep alone. Even during the deepest, darkest, coldest night of winter, a chickadee seeks out no more warmth than the puff of its own feathers. For years I've known that Chickadees spend winter nights in the swallow nest boxes on the Farmhouse at Creamer's Field. More than 60 days of winter observation has revealed only one bird entering a box in the evening (right at dusk) and one bird exiting a box in the morning (right at dawn).

Why not have a boxmate for the evening? Further south, "communal" roosting has been observed in the closely related Mountain Chickadee and other species such as nuthatches and kinglets to name a few. Why not our Black-capped Chickadee? I believe the bird prefers not to compromise its insulating layer of feathers by pressing or touching another individual during long cold nights. I'll keep watching the box just in case.



A simple winter roost box is one with the same dimensions as a summer nest box for swallows or chickadees. Get a roosting box or roost box plans at Creamer's Field, 459-7307. Do you have a chickadee roosting near your home? Susan Sharbaugh, a biologist studying chickadees would like to know, 451-7159.



Friends of Creamer's Field  
P.O. Box 81065  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99708

Is it time to renew your membership?